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A LETTER FROM
THEODORE ROOSEVELT



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AMERICANISM IN
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CHICAGO
THE BLAKELY-OSWALD CO.
1908

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THE INTRODUCTION



URING the presidential campaign of 1908 an attempt was made to inject into it the question as to the religious belief of the republican candidate for president of the United States—Mr. Taft.

A number of letters on the subject were written to President Roosevelt from various parts of the country but he answered none of them during the campaign.

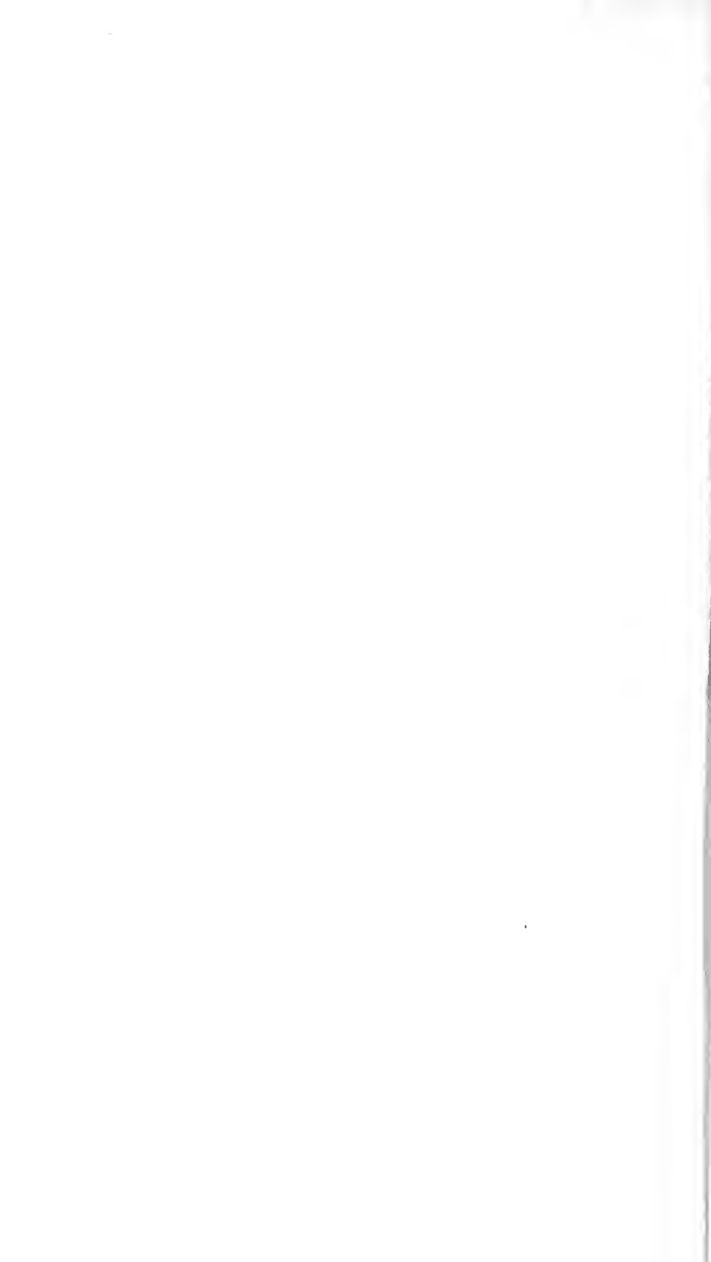
After the campaign was over,

THE INTRODUCTION

however, the president wrote an answer to one as an answer to all, and made the letter public, and it was published in the newspapers throughout the country.

The letter as an exposition of true Americanism in religion met with approbation from all sides, but as it was not in permanent form for preservation the compiler of this book felt that a service would be done the American people by having it made so, inasmuch as he felt that it was something which should be preserved for reference in every library in our country.





THE LETTER

“My dear sir: I have received your letter running in part as follows:

“ ‘While it is claimed almost universally that religion should not enter into politics, yet there is no denying it does, and the mass of the voters that are not Catholics will not support a man for any office, especially for president of the United States, who is a Roman Catholic.

“ ‘Since Taft has been nominated for president by the republican party, it is being circulated and is constantly urged as a reason for not voting for Taft, that he is an infidel [Unitarian], and his wife and brother Roman Catholics. If his feelings are in sympathy with the Roman Catholic church on account of his wife and brother being Catholics, that would be objectionable to a sufficient number of voters to defeat him. On the other hand, if he is an infidel, that would be sure to mean defeat. I am writing this letter for the sole pur-

pose of giving Mr. Taft an opportunity to let the world know what his religious belief is.'

SHOULDN'T BE USED IN POLITICS.

"I received many such letters as yours during the campaign, expressing dissatisfaction with Mr. Taft on religious grounds; some of them on the ground that he was a Unitarian and others on the ground that he was suspected to be in sympathy with Catholics. I did not answer any of these letters during the campaign, because I regarded it as an outrage even to agitate such a question as a man's

religious convictions with the purpose of influencing a political election.

“But now that the campaign is over, when there is opportunity for men calmly to consider wither such propositions as those you make in your letter would lead, I wish to invite them to consider them, and I have selected your letter to answer because you advance both the objections commonly urged against Mr. Taft—namely: that he is a Unitarian and also that he is suspected of sympathy with the Catholics.

“You ask that Mr. Taft shall ‘let the world know what his religious belief is.’ This is purely his own private concern, and it is a matter between him and his Maker, a matter for his own conscience; and to require it to be made public under penalty of political discrimination is to negative the first principles of our government, which guarantee complete religious liberty and the right to each man to act in religious affairs as his own conscience dictates.

“Mr. Taft never asked my advice in the matter, but if he had

asked it I should have emphatically advised him against thus stating publicly his religious belief. The demand for a statement of a candidate's religious belief can have no meaning except that there may be discrimination for or against him because of that belief.

HALT TO TRUE LIBERTY.

“Discrimination against the holder of one faith means retaliatory discrimination against men of other faiths. The inevitable result of entering upon such a practice would be an abandonment of

our real freedom of conscience and a reversion to the dreadful conditions of religious dissension which in so many lands have proved fatal to true liberty; to true religion, and to all advance in civilization.

“To discriminate against a thoroughly upright citizen because he belongs to some particular church or because, like Abraham Lincoln, he has not avowed his allegiance to any church, is an outrage against that liberty of conscience which is one of the foundations of American life. You are entitled to know whether a man seeking your suf-

frages is a man of clean and upright life, honorable in all his dealings with his fellows, and fit by qualification and purpose to do well in the great office for which he is a candidate, but you are not entitled to know matters which lie purely between himself and his Maker.

“If it is proper or legitimate to oppose a man for being a Unitarian, as was John Quincy Adams, for instance; as is the Rev. Edward Everett Hale, at the present moment chaplain of the senate and an American of whose life all good Americans are proud — then it

would be equally proper to support or oppose a man because of his views on justification by faith or the method of administering the sacrament or the gospel or salvation by works. If you once enter on such a career there is absolutely no limit at which you can legitimately stop.

SLANDER OF FELLOW CITIZENS.

“So much for your objections to Mr. Taft because he is a Unitarian. Now for your objections to him because you think his wife and brother to be Roman Catholics.

As it happens, they are not; but if they were, or if he were a Roman Catholic himself, it ought not to affect in the slightest degree any man's supporting him for the position of president.

“You say that ‘the mass of the voters who are not Catholics will not support a man for any office, especially for president of the United States, who is a Roman Catholic.’ I believe that when you say this you foully slander your fellow countrymen. I do not for one moment believe that the mass of our fellow citizens, or that any

considerable number of our fellow citizens, can be influenced by such narrow bigotry as to refuse to vote for any thoroughly upright and fit man because he happens to have a particular religious creed.

“Such a consideration should never be treated as a reason for either supporting or opposing a candidate for a political office. Are you aware that there are several states in this union where the majority of the people are now Catholics? I should reprobate in the severest terms the Catholics who in those states or in any other

states refused to vote for the most fit man because he happened to be a Protestant; and my condemnation would be exactly as severe for Protestants who, under reversed circumstances, refused to vote for a Catholic.

WHERE CREED COUNTS NOT.

“In public life I am happy to say that I have known many men who were elected and constantly re-elected, to office in districts where the great majority of their constituents were of a different religious belief. I know Catholics

who have for many years represented constituencies mainly Protestant, and Protestants who have for many years represented constituencies mainly Catholic, and among the congressmen I know particularly well was one man of Jewish faith who represented a district in which there were hardly any Jews at all. All of these men by their very existence in political life refute the slander you have uttered against your fellow Americans.

“I believe this republic will endure for many centuries. If so

there doubtless will be among its presidents Protestants and Catholics, and probably at some time Jews. I have constantly tried while president to act in relation to my fellow Americans of Catholic faith as I hope that any future president who happens to be a Catholic will act toward his fellow Americans of Protestant faith. Had I followed any other course I should have felt I was unfit to represent the American people.

DIVERGENT FAITHS IN CABINET.

“In my cabinet at the present moment there sit side by side

Catholic and Protestant, Christian and Jew, each man chosen because in my belief he is peculiarly fit to exercise on behalf of all our people the duties of the office to which I have appointed him. In no case does the man's religious belief in any way influence his discharge of his duties, save as it makes him more eager to act justly and uprightly in his relations to all men.

“ The same principles that have obtained in appointing the members of my cabinet, the highest officials under me, the officials to whom is intrusted the work of

carrying out all the important policies of my administration, are the principles upon which all good Americans should act in choosing, whether by election or appointment, the men to fill any office from the highest to the lowest in the land.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT."



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